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The Road Runs Past

By MAHLON LEONARD FISHER

The road runs past that used to pause;
The tiny lane that led from it
Is filled with weeds, and lichen-writ
And -runed the bars that no one draws.

The road runs past: it has forgot,
Meseems, the way it paused of old
To part the meadow's rippling gold,
Sun-ripened, from the pasture-lot.

It has forgot, and haply all
Who loved it have forgotten too,
With other things they loved and knew,
Beneath the grasses rank and tall.

The road runs past — is it because
The house is empty, day by day,
Behind the hill? . . . I only say —
The road runs past that used to pause.

Boot Hill Graveyard

By GWENDOLEN HASTE

The dead lie today
High on a fair hill
Swept by sweet breezes,
Shaded by softly shimmering trees.
Peacefully they lie there;
Around them spreads the shining valley;
Far away are the cool blue mountains.

But down in the flats,
On a gravelly sun-bitten slope
Lie the early dead.
Those dead that came when the land was new
And lived coarsely and died violently,
With their boots on,
And were buried in Boot Hill Graveyard.
There are no cherished flowers here,
No clipt lawns nor white marbles;
Only the sparse grass of the dry lands,
Rude slabs of sandstone,
Bare, sunken patches of ground,
Fierceness of the beating sun.

Oh you early dead,
You wild, rough pioneers,
You hairy, swaggering bad men of the west,
Are you not glad you lie here
Under the glaring sky,
With the gales hurling themselves over your broken
 headstones
And the loco blossom springing from your graves?

Weaver

By LOUISE TOWNSEND NICHOLL

I met you once upon the road, Weaver,
 Your tapestry of Beauty just begun.
I gave you all I had of color, only
 A thread, but joyous when it caught the sun.
Dull-blue it was, I think, slender and stout,
 But, as I gave, you told me you were glad,
Since this was such a color as you loved,
 A little different from the ones you had.
Now you find color everywhere, Weaver.
 Your tapestry has grown as Aprils pass,
And you have seen the violets' beauty make
 A sweet, erratic pattern in the grass.
We do not meet again. But I am glad—
My thread was different from the ones you had.

Stepping Westward

By BENJAMIN ROSENBLATT

Up the harbor advances a steamer of the Canadian Immigrant Line to its landing place on the edge of the city. Watching it from the pier is a throng of people, some of whom have been waiting since break of day in a fever of suspense. The surf tosses and tumbles its spray: then subsides as the vessel is hauled in and made fast. The plank is laid across; and, as soon as the well-dressed have jauntily passed over, room is made for the steerage foreigners.

And forms uncouth, with faces wilted and withered, suddenly appear out of the under deck. The aged, as well as those on the threshold of life, betray curiosity, wide-eyed fear, palpitating anxiety.

A feverish element pervades the scene. There is a commotion among the bystanders, as one recognizes another. Many embrace, make attempts at speech more or less futile,—and, among this crowd, lost in the hurly-burly, stands a swarthy young woman with a child in her arms, casting fearful and distorted glances on the seething mass before her.

Like many of her fellow-passengers, she has come utterly worn out with her myriad woes, expecting to be met here by her husband to whom she may

finally outpour what she has endured. Sustained by this hope, she has accepted every humiliation without complaint. The wretchedness of the long voyage has been lightened by her faith in him. Her pulses, that surged so high during the landing as to cause her pain, now beat in an agony of dread, while she clutches her child closer, and looks imploringly at those about her.

She feels sure that her husband will appear before long. Where is he? Now and again her breath fails her, so vivid is her fancy that his true image is about to emerge from the crowd. Up and down the deck she begins to stride, enraged with animal fierceness. Time drags on, and the multitude is vanishing, mostly arm in arm.

"Only he, where is he?" escapes from her throat; and her face takes on a grimace of helplessness, and she tosses the whimpering baby in her arms, faltering: "Papa will come soon, dear. He will, he must,—you'll see he will soon be here."

The last words she utters indignantly, glancing about at the remaining passengers whom she has made her confidants on the way, and to whom she has imparted day by day her cheerful expectations.

But they are all engrossed with their friends, laughing now more freely. Presently she observes that they eye her with pity, and she turns to them sullenly: "My husband is late, but he is coming bye and bye." Her acquaintances propose to her to go with them, while they try to find her husband for her. This only makes her the more indignant; and

she follows them with flashing eyes, as they pass out into the street, hatred growing high in her heart. She is sure that their kindness was expressed only to irritate her.

"None of them will be left when he comes," rushes through her brain. No one will envy her happiness or participate in her joy. And how her heart yearns for him!

"Where is he?" a voice within her calls tremulously,—a cry that struggles for utterance, but which she tries to suppress.

Her acquaintances have all gone, and she becomes terror-stricken at the loneliness that suddenly extends itself around her. She is crowded from place to place, until she finds a remote corner and quietly seats herself upon one of her bundles. Automatically she puts her breast into the child's mouth, and bends her head low over it. There is a fold of her shawl against her lips, and she bites it fiercely between her teeth.

"Where do you wish to go?" asks one of the officers. The question is interpreted to her; and she pulls out a card, bearing the address of her husband. The officer undertakes to direct her, but she turns away, murmuring: "I will wait for him; he will come bye and bye."

The day has begun to die away. She has spent hours, gazing through the two iron gates that close the pier into the street where so many strangers walk, till her perceptions are dulled and her heart is

dead. She has ceased to rebel at her situation, but her lips have not ceased to say: "He will come, dear, he will come."

The last of the day dwindles and disappears. Evening gradually spreads over the harbor, and the men who at a distance push the loaded cart of baggage seem like shadows running to and fro.

Her eyes wander aimlessly through the dusk. Before her spreads the Hudson River, whence the multitudinous whistles of the boats,—some shrieking and piercing, others wailing and moaning, float on the night air, and far away, across the river, thousands of little fires are gleaming.

She sees through the gloom the surface of the water, livid and smooth. For a moment she sees the river rise, overflowing the bank and nearing her. She utters a feeble cry, and bestirs herself to drive away the vision.

Darkness all around. The noise of the baggage carts has ceased altogether. The vacuity of the huge pier seems to whisper in the silence, and to spread out immeasurably while she, sitting on her bundle in a remote corner, is growing smaller and smaller. The ships groan and howl; the lights on the opposite shore grow fainter and fainter; and the light in her eyes is extinguished with them. Her head bends lower on her breast, and her lips tremble to the form of the words, "He will come soon, he will come bye and bye."

Songs While the Leaves are Falling

By GLENN WARD DRESBACH

I

There is a slender tree that grows
Beside a road where people pass;
Through it a wind that chills it goes
And shakes its leaves upon the grass,
And I, who watched those same leaves grow
All fresh and green, and Summer long
Heard their young whispers and their song,
Then saw their golden passage, know
Two golden leaves are clinging now
Upon one little twisted bough
Half-hidden, and when winds are high
Two rustling golden banners fly,
Tiny, but bright against the gray
Of troubled skies that care not how
Leaves cling awhile or drift away.

When will these golden banners come
From their high place to join the dumb
And driven throng that moves with Death?
Each day I look with hurried breath,
And wish that they might wave and cling
To see the promise of the Spring.

And O, my Heart, so you may hold
Two Dreams that Life may turn to gold —
When all my other dreams must pass
Like leaves blown down upon the grass.

II

When once the bud has made the rose
It cannot be the bud again —
Its passion stirs, its glory grows
Beyond its being then.

So, Dream, since you the Real have made,
You cannot be the dream and rest —
For I have kissed her lips and laid
My head upon her breast.

III

The birds are flying to the South.
Their calls drift down the skies.
The song that trembled at my lips
Falls pierced with doubt, and dies.

The birds are flying South to trees
With green leaves brightly spread. . . .
Shall all my singing dreams leave me
When Youth is dead?

IV

If I had choice to be a tree
I would not be an evergreen,
Living with peaceful certainty,
Seeing the same boughs I had seen
Since I had sprouted, always sure
My greenery would still endure
The change of seasons, never thrilled
With rapturous leaves, while nothing killed
But slow, dull Age. . . . O I would be
Any kind of growing tree
That knows the magic and the thrill
Of glowing leaves, that frost can kill
Only by turning them to gold.
O I would stand with branches bold
Braving the winds until again
The benediction of warm rain
Fell on the earth, and song came up
From all my roots, and I could sup
And dine with all the gods of Earth,
And fear no death, grown wise in birth.

V

The man may be the child again
When Autumn winds in shadow moan,
And the cold rains beat the window pane
And a heart feels all alone.

I will not bear this loneliness,
This madness, this unrest —
I shall go out and gently press
The dead leaves to my breast.

VI

What is this voice that calls
Like a dream in the night,
Bringing thoughts that are flushed
All rosy-bright.

The voice says, "I am the love
That came in the Spring,
And whispered until you lived
In my whispering.

"I am the love that took
The wrinkles from your brow."
And I answer the voice in the night,
"It is Autumn now.

"And I hear the whisper of leaves
That fade, and silently
The dark clouds pass. . . . Be gone —
Or comfort me!"

VII

Drunken fellows, all together
Let us dance away,
Gold leaf, yellow leaf,
And leaf all crimson-gay,—
We are drunken with the World
That bids us on our way.

Drunken fellows, all together
Let us outward fare
With a chuckling madness
Through the frosted air —
Now the World is through with us
Show we do not care!

The Quest

By AGNES MARY BROWNELL

“Hear you’re goin’ to leave us, Eddie — young blood, young blood — must go adventuring!” cackled old Johnny Meek, shaking his popper over the blaze with a practiced hand. Old Johnny had raised the humble calling of pop-corn vender almost to the dignity of a profession; he had a fine, shining, glass-enclosed cart which displayed his commodities to the best advantage, and a little hopper constantly jangling with coins of the smaller denominations. Old Johnny Meek had on a time been young and adventuresome himself, and had come home a crippled pop-corn vender.

“What — Eddie going away? That’s new! Not crossed in love, are you Eddie?”

A short, stocky, good-natured young fellow with the color of a girl, his bulky figure looking somehow quite trim in its enveloping apron — he was Willy Gentry, head clerk in Gregg’s Grocery — stopped on his errand across the street, and laid a broad and friendly arm about the slender shoulders of the young man whose movements seemed to be of enough importance temporarily to suspend traffic in the little main street.

Eddie Pease good-naturedly shook off the imputation. He disliked to be called “Eddie”. He reflected that he would be gone long enough for them to forget that he had ever been “Eddie”. “Honorable Eddie Pease” — how it would sound. “Pease” was bad enough — what a terrible irony that the Peases’ should be market-gardeners! Well, he couldn’t get away from the name, but he could give up the calling. He stood there thinking these things and saying nothing, smiling constrainedly.

The market-garden was on the edge of town. His polished shoes became gray the moment he left the paving. He saw his mother and sister Emma working in one of the beds. His sister wore an enormous sun-bonnet, a faded cotton sacque and bloomers; it was very hot and dirty work. Eddie changed quickly and went about his share; he was leaving next morning; that afternoon he had gone up town to draw money for the journey. But tonight he would leave nothing undone.

They ate silently; his brother had hired a new man to take Eddie's place — this was his first meal with them. The men ate stolidly, but Eddie noticed that his mother and sister scarcely touched their food. His sister Emma spoke sharply to her mother out of her anxiety, urging her in an undertone. The mother dutifully picked up her fork which shook in her hand; she was a small, dark woman, whose hair had not turned gray; under this cap of sleek, low-growing black hair, her face looked shrivelled — all cut into lines like a face carved on a nut; and her eyes which had been brown had faded out, like fabric too much washed; now they looked curiously dark, like stuff under water.

After supper Eddie set about the watering, but his brother good-naturedly took the hose from him — "Come — come, now! Don't you want to see someone? It's your last night!"

Eddie thought; whom should he see? Suddenly he felt quite romantic — he would call upon Marcia Kirk. He had only the friendliest feeling for Marcia whom he had known always. He had never even thought of her as pretty; he had not thought of her at all. But there was something pleasant in the idea of seeing her before he went.

He washed up at the sink in the kitchen; his sister was there, setting sponge for bread. He splashed frightfully, sending the water in little rills down her clean oil-cloth. When he had gone, she didn't even wipe the splashes away, though she had been used to scold him for less. She went into the sitting-room where her mother was sitting at a window.

"What's he doing?" asked the mother.

"Washing. I guess mebbe he's going out."

"Are you through?"

"Yes — it's all done, and the bread set."

"I mean — his clothes —"

"Yes; that is, John took the old socks and gave me his box of new ones for Eddie. Shall I light the lamp, mother?"

"Not yet. When'll he be down?"

"He's coming now."

"Light it."

Eddie came into the light blinking. He had on his new suit, but he was turned out in such manner as only a man's own women folk can effect; his linen had the fresh sweetness distilled from the domestic tub. In the presence of his mother and sister he felt somehow less heroic, but he managed to say casually:

"Guess I'll go over to Kirks' awhile."

"Marcy Kirk's a good girl," approved his mother.

However Emma could not forbear a slight sniff, as her brother disappeared. What if Marcia Kirk was a good girl — what had she ever done for Eddie?

The Kirks' lived a little way up the street, in a square house with a vine enclosed porch. Eddie knocked; and Marcia's sister Ida came to the door. Ida was older than Marcia, and Eddie had always furtively admired her. He thought her very handsome; she was tall, rather plump, and of a dashing dark type. She was so near him that he could see

the little gold freckles in her white skin, and her lashes with their bold upward curve. Still he seemed not at all to wish to see her.

"Marcy in?" he asked awkwardly.

Ida's eyes, her curved lashes and her golden freckles, seemed to laugh up at him.

"Marcy! You're wanted!" she called down the narrow, dusky hall.

Marcia came toward him through the dark entry. He thought she was like a picture in a narrow frame. He did not remember ever to have taken her hand before, but this was different. Her fingers were moist; she had been wiping dishes, and had hurried to throw off her apron when she heard his voice.

They sat in the porch which was like a sweet, green room. In the dusk the vines were like a wonderful tapestry where the leaves seemed to move. After all, when he had seen her, there seemed to be little to say. Young folks have no old times to talk of, and the future was only a pleasant blank. They were neither of them imaginative. Presently he rose to go. Again he felt her fingers, soft, cool and moist in his palm; her face was a white blur. He had the strangest feeling of not wishing to go away after all; he began to say something of this — it was all rather incoherent. And suddenly he knew that what he wanted most of all was just to kiss her.

A heel clicked on the Kirk walk. Eddie dropped the hand. What madness had assailed him — almost to commit himself before his quest was even begun? He said awkwardly, "Well, good-bye, Marcy!"

By this time the intruder had reached the porch. It was Willy Gentry. Eddie felt a sudden surge of gratitude toward him; he wrung his hand warmly, and went down the walk. He heard Marcia say, "I think Ida went over to Shaws'; I'll call her."

"No you don't, Sister Annie!" boomed the voice of Willy Gentry. Eddie remembered to have heard his sister Emma speak of Willy's calling at the Kirks'; he continued to have the liveliest feeling of gratitude toward Willy; he regarded him almost in the light of a preserver.

They were up betimes next morning. His mother and sister showed an almost frantic haste. It struck him that it was a rather unusual breakfast — so many good things; the surprising thing was, that he felt no desire for food. His brother John ate steadily through the meal; the new man went about it in rather a furtive and apologetic manner; his sister Emma eyed the two resentfully, switching from table to stove. Eddie felt a little sullen flame; they seemed to be afraid he might miss his train. How could he know that the mere going is a greater wrench than absence. One becomes reconciled to that.

His brother John drove him to the train in the vegetable wagon, and the last thing he saw was the humped, white tarpaulin which covered the produce. His good-bye to his mother and Emma seemed a blank. A dull anger rose in him. Where was gone all that joy of anticipation? Was it only a will-o'-the-wisp to mock him?

There was a family sitting across the aisle; from the conversation he knew they were returning from California; there were children — the younger ones very fretful and uneasy. It transpired that their lunch had given out — at the next stop they would purchase more.

Eddie opened the box Emma had given him; everything was wrapped in napkins of white tissue; the peculiar, boxed-up odor of packed food was diffused. He was not of fine sensibility — he never noted the cloying odor — but he could not have touched a morsel. He could see Emma spreading the bread and turning the bacon in the pan; he remembered his mother in her chair, stirring and stirring the cake batter. A sort of film came over his eyes; he almost forced the box into his neighbors' hands. "Take — take!" he muttered. Perhaps the woman saw — mother of five; she did not offer him pay; but later her husband came over and talked with him largely and enthusiastically of the West.

At the noon stop he got out and went into the depot restaurant where he ate ravenously — baked beans in little ramekins, coffee and doughnuts. He felt better — almost like himself.

He began to think with his old anticipatory pleasure of his meeting with Fred Ladd. It was owing to Fred that he was going to the city. Fred had played in the band that had been engaged during fair week the previous year. Eddie had fallen in with him, for he, too, on occasion, tooted a dismal cornet. Fred had dwelt knowingly upon the life of

cities. From an inner pocket, Eddie drew a late communication from him. It was optimistic, if somewhat vague in tone. The note reflected its author. Fred himself, awaiting his friend in the station, was revealed as a good-natured, irresponsible youth in cheap clothes of extreme cut. He piloted the country boy knowingly across the city, and they came after an interminable street-car ride to the Ladds' domicile — an obscure little frame. Mrs. Ladd gave him a warm and motherly welcome — she herself had been a country girl, and she had not outgrown the country way. She was of a comfortable and complacent bulk, and she wore gray calico beneath a white apron with an ornate knitted edge.

"This is my daughter, Maud," said Mrs. Ladd, drawing the girl forward. She put her hand, not in his but straight forward with a little groping movement and then he saw that the girl with large, dark, wide-open eyes, was blind. Mr. Ladd came home at supper-time; he was employed in the shoe department of an uptown store. He was one of that pitifully large class — the waifs of a city — who are by nature the small town type.

Eddie accompanied him next morning, but there was no vacancy in all the great store, nor apparently in the city. Never had he ached so after a day in the sun in the truck garden. He was ashamed to return to the Ladd's at night, but a terrible homesickness drove him. There was no lack of warmth and encouragement there; the blind face of Maud lit up at his coming; she began to talk to him happily in her

curiously even voice. Mrs. Ladd had biscuits and honey for supper — the sweet, hot food put courage into him. Fred proposed that he come along to band practice; there might be a chance there — at least a transient engagement to tide him over.

The leader gave him scant attention; but at a certain passage — a sort of cadenza — he suddenly indicated the hapless Eddie — “You blay him!”

Eddie stared a frozen instant at the passage; desperate impulse urged him on. At the conclusion, amid silence, the German addressed the company — “Vell, he did it; only he didn’t blay it in der rightt key.” He did not ask Eddie to return.

There ensued a terrible week of wandering. He had no money, and always at night, in shame and desperation, he returned to the Ladds’; and always Maud’s blind face greeted him with more than any light of eyes; and always Mrs. Ladd urged on him the hot and savory expression of her welcome. Fred played daily in the parks, and Mr. Ladd, smelling faintly of leather, opined that next day something would surely turn up.

One night when he returned, at first they did not recognize him. At last he had found work — as a day laborer with a paving gang. He had not even enough to pay for his laborer’s garb whose crass blue was already dulled with earth strains, and dank with perspiration. He had left his suit for surety. Mrs. Ladd heated water, and he filled a tub in the wash-house; when he had dressed in some of his older belongings, he felt like one who had come up out of bondage.

This feeling was heightened when scrupulously every week he paid Mrs. Ladd. From this revenue, which they termed the "board money", Mrs Ladd was sometimes enabled to extract a bit of finery for Maud — ribbon for her hair, or fresh flummery for her hat. Maud took a naive delight in these things and their source, as conscious of them in truth as any girl would be in the wearing — for who when abroad, can see her own head? Eddie, too, derived a peculiar pleasure by reason of his share in his little blind friend's adornment. A certain dull, bright ribbon that she wore — the peculiar red of the stems and veins in the homely leaves of the rhubarb in the old garden, gave him the queerest pleasurable sensation. The very literalness of the impression made it the more poignant. That was how he began to talk to Maud about the garden. It was as if, after the broiling day, the shield-like glitter of the earth-polished spades, the endless lifting of shovels full of dirt, they two repaired to a garden of dull, green, growing things. It was not imagination, but a terrible literalness that made him see her white face blurred into the likeness of the moon-flowers in his mother's garden.

Sometimes on Sundays they went to the amusement park where Fred played — the elder Ladds contemplating in proud complacency the band-stand and the uniformed players; Eddie and Maud on a neighboring bench munching peanuts and chatting, neither attentive nor oblivious to the music which flowed past them like the murmuring of a pleasant

stream. Maud's blind face on such occasions took on a vivid luminousness. Her wide hat with the bright hued flowers, dipping a little under its trimming, shadowed her dark, wide-open eyes; a faint color lay over her cheeks. Once a chance passer-by observed lightly to his companion, "That's a pretty girl — such great eyes!" "He means you!" whispered Eddie, delightedly. "He means me!" said Maud; and bridled with the charming insolence of a petted child.

He had heard from home; and he would have written oftener, except for shame and pride; he promised himself that when his fortunes improved, he would write home every week. The first time he read the name of Marcia Kirk in his sister's letter, the name seemed to leap up at him like a little flame. Emma wrote in her stilted manner that it was reported that Willy Gentry was waiting upon Marcia. Eddie did not reply to this letter; he did not wish to know about Willy and Marcia, and he reflected that Emma, awaiting his reply, would be deterred from writing for a time. It was some weeks before he heard again, and then there was no direct mention of Marcia. Emma wrote, "Willy's house is about finished. I guess the wedding will be soon now. I never see them — I never see anybody, or go anywhere. It's work all the time."

The next letter, when Eddie took it up from his dresser, where Mrs. Ladd always placed his mail, seemed in the very feel of it to be fraught with significance. Enough time had elapsed for any hap-

pening. That envelope, of flimsy texture, and smudged along its sealed edge, seemed to contain a very missive of fate. He decided not to open it till after supper, and dropped it into his upper drawer.

After supper, he read to Maud. She was passionately fond of a certain type of stories — love stories with happy endings. She was knitting a strip of crimson silk; her white fingers were streaked with the slender threads, and above her thin hands with their silken burden, her large, brown, sightless eyes were fixed in the direction of his voice.

When he got up to go — “Making something pretty?” he asked, clumsily fingering the pliant silk.

She snatched it to her with a little hiding movement. “O—you musn’t look!” she cried. She patted his sleeve, smiling up at him archly and tenderly, as an older person sometimes smiles at a meddlesome little boy.

When he had gone upstairs again, he looked down at the letter, lying unopened in the drawer. He wished now that he had opened it at once, when he found it staring up at him from the dresser. He felt less than ever like opening it now; so he went to bed; and all next day, working in the broken road, he planned what the letter must contain. Still at night, all that added burden of suspense went into the substance of the letter. If he could have been told! but to open the envelope, unfold the paper, search out the words! If he could hear the words, there would be nothing but silence to follow; but to see them — the written words — they would con-

tinue to be present before him — the very place where they were written on the sheet. The dreadful literalness of his mind that made things not imagined but actual, read the words through their flimsy covering.

He struck a match, and touched it to a corner of the unopened letter; the flame spread bluey, leaving a black char with crimson edges. When it approached his fingers, he dropped the blazing paper into his water pitcher — it made a sizzling noise; a fragment of black tissue floated on the surface; and he had disposed of Emma's news.

The next morning he felt a curious elation — the nearest approach to the old adventurous glamour; it suddenly occurred to him that he need not return to the slavish work with the paving. He dressed carefully, as for a Sunday park excursion with Maud and her parents. The Ladds' were all sympathy and optimism. The fall season was approaching; the slack time was nearly over. Mr. Ladd, himself rather gray and leathery like a scuffed shoe, brightened up wonderfully as sponsor for Eddie's new venture, and the two of them went off blithely together, Mrs. Ladd and Maud waving from the door.

As it chanced, there was extra work connected with a consignment of goods just arrived, which was being unpacked in the basement of the department store where Mr. Ladd was employed. And here was Eddie — right at hand and vouched for by an old trustworthy employee. Fortunately, the basement work demanded no great skill of computa-

tion; and Eddie in his Sunday clothes opening boxes and arranging their contents, displaying the utmost good-humor and willingness to serve, made an excellent impression. The novelty of his position that first day had something almost theatrical about it; the artificial lights, the girl clerks, looking curiously dressed-up, the stream of customers, mostly women bargain hunters, kept his mind on the alert. There was one girl whom they called "Dolly"—so tiny—with a face so rounded, so colored, so framed in with dark curls, as to resemble one of the brown haired dolls displayed in long pasteboard boxes in the toy section. Eddie thought she was quite the prettiest thing he had ever seen; he looked at her a great deal; he observed enviously the free-masonry among the other clerks—they were Minnie and Hazel; Jimmie and Scootie to each other. The last named, an amiable youth who seemed to have taken Eddie under his protection, observing the direction of the new clerk's glances, proposed generously: "Want to meet her?" and presently Eddie found himself taking part in a small ceremony—"Miss Pettit—make you acquainted with Mr. Pease."

Miss Pettit, looking more than ever like a life-sized doll, acknowledged the formality with a perky movement of the head as if a string had been pulled somewhere within the doll's mechanism, and observed pleasantly:

"Call me Dolly."

He retorted daringly: "Call me Eddie, and I will!"

He accompanied her to her car at closing time and handed her elegantly up the steps, his fingers under her elbow. Through the car window she looked for all the world like a doll in a glass case. But strangely, in recounting the events of his day to the Ladds, he never mentioned dolls.

By the end of the week they were very well acquainted. Saturday night, after the late closing, when his poor Dolly was so tired that her round, brown eyes kept blinking as if some bit of mechanism were out of order, he patted her hand awkwardly and said: "Well — good-bye, Doll — till Monday."

"Till Monday?" asked Dolly, making her eyes very round.

It had actually never occurred to Eddie that he could see her between times. He had come to consider that his evenings and his Sundays belonged to the Ladds', just as his days belonged to the store.

"What's the matter with Sunday?" asked Dolly, laughing in her jerkiest, most doll-like manner.

"Sundays —" stammered Eddie; "why — Sundays — we go to the park."

"So do I," returned Dolly, carelessly; "when I'm asked!"

"Me and the Ladds'," blundered Eddie unhappily, thinking of Maud.

"Ladds!" said Dolly. "You mean that little old dried-up leather man in the shoes? Perhaps there is a Miss Ladd!"

"Only Maud," pleaded Eddie.

"O—only Maud!" It would be impossible to reproduce the way in which Dolly pronounced the words, "only Maud." As one would say of an unexpected legacy, "only a million."

"She's blind," said Eddie.

The round, brown doll-like eyes regarded him steadily out of the softly colored contours of the doll-like face; if they could no more change expression than the crystal eyes of the dolls in the show cases, could one blame the dolls for that? She began slowly to move away.

It was a long time before Eddie won her reluctant consent to accompany him on the morrow. That foolish, literal habit of mind of his which had come to associate Sunday with the small festivity of the Ladd's Sunday dinner and Sunday excursion—Maud in some specially prized finery stored up against this day, and the elder Ladds looking modestly prosperous—had almost lost him Miss Pettit's regard. Finally in a sort of weary petulance, she surrendered her address—1125 Vine.

But after he had got home that night, he remembered the Ladds fast enough. He went to sleep, trying to frame a casual, off-hand excuse for Sunday afternoon. Next morning when he saw Mrs. Ladd putting the potatoes into cold water and Maud smoothing the Sunday cloth with her knowing hands, he knew he could never partake of that sacrificial feast. He suddenly blurted out:

"I—I—got an engagement!"

Mrs. Ladd dropped in the last potato. "Engage-

ment?" Then she bethought her of the mournful cornet and the band. "That's nice; we'll come to hear you."

"With a lady," said Eddie, unhappily.

He saw Mr. Ladd looking at him over the Sunday paper; Fred, who had been polishing his boots on the kitchen steps, stopped whistling and surveyed him with a long and comprehending wink.

Maud went on smoothing the cloth, and her face as she turned it toward him, was full of a sweet invitation—"You can stay to dinner, can't you, Eddie?"

"No," said Eddie; which was literal truth; he could not bring himself to that.

So he ate his dinner in a cheap little restaurant, and loathed every mouthful; and with every mouthful he felt a happy elation. Then he walked lonesomely up and down the streets, and as early as he dared he took Dolly's car.

1125 Vine was a little frame and latticed house; it had a porch and a vine like a house back home; and in a swinging seat, looking wonderfully pretty and fluffy and expensive, like a prize doll at a bazaar, sat Dolly.

No one disturbed them. The vined porch seemed to be Dolly's own domain. For a time, a clatter as of the cleansing of Sunday dishes, sounded distantly; and the thud, thud, of stockinged feet in a rocker came from a room off the tiny entry. Eddie would have asked nothing better than this green and gold retreat, like a little room hung with a pleasant pattern of chintz; but Dolly leaned to a promenade and the kaleidoscopic glitter of the Sunday park.

It was all a gallant and wonderful dream to Eddie; and, as in a dream, late in the afternoon they came upon the Ladds' sitting in their usual place not far from the band-stand. Fred, for a wonder, was with them, looking very fine in his gray and gilt. It was Fred who had called out, "Well — if here isn't Eddie! Face the music, Eddie. Stand and deliver!"

Eddie was so flustered he actually couldn't recall their names in the introductions; but presently he found himself saying, "And this is Maud." Maud extended her hand in her pretty groping fashion, with her lifted face in the direction of his voice. Eddie thought he had never seen a look so blind and yet so seeing. He wished he had not looked at Maud. And presently in a queer way he found them all strolling together, with Dolly and Fred ahead, and Maud with him. After they had walked a little way, Maud asked, anxiously: "Is she pretty, Eddie?"

"I think so," said Eddie.

"Then I shall think so, too," said Maud with pretty positiveness.

He told Dolly about it when he said good-bye in the green and gold chintz porch (only now the colors were more sombre). "How funny!" said Dolly, in her little jerky, doll-like fashion.

Fred dropped into the department store several times the following week, presumably attracted by the Basement Bargains. Fred, in civilian clothes, lost in comparison with his Sunday uniformed ap-

pearance, being distinctly short and stocky, deficiencies less apparent in military garb. The next Sunday was Maud's birthday — the birthday came midway in the week, but its celebration was deferred till Sunday. Eddie, in great secrecy, sought Mrs. Ladd anent the matter of a suitable gift on the occasion of a lady's birthday.

Mrs. Ladd's reply was most amazing; she said promptly, "Red roses." But she added hastily, "Not the expensive kind, Eddie, with the long stems. Maybe you think it's kind of foolish of Maud — and flowers so perishable — but you asked me, so I tell you."

"Red roses!" repeated Eddie; "red roses. She shall have them, stems and all!"

It was decided to make a little party of it and invite Dolly. Dolly accepted with one of her little doll-like ejaculations — "How nice!" Fred went up to the car line to meet her; Eddie was helping put an extra leaf in the table; he had been helping all morning. In his old literal way he saw the day only as Maud's birthday, and his sole thought was its success. The roses had been delivered early by a boy on a wheel from the florist's. Eddie had staged everything; he had Maud on the porch as the boy rode up, dismounted and came up the steps with the green pasteboard box.

"Miss Maud Ladd?" read the boy, inquiringly.

"This is the lady," said Eddie, beaming.

"O — O —" breathed Maud, taking the box in her pretty, groping hands.

"Let me help you," offered Eddie; "sort of a knot here."

He lifted the lid. What are asphodels but the fabled roses of paradise? Maud stood in her little Garden of Eden with its sagging floor where the posts were rotting, and smelled her heavenly roses. They were like red torches lighting up her darkness.

"Red roses!" breathed Maud. She looked at Eddie, and she looked at her roses, seeing them both with some deeper, spiritual insight beyond the ken of seeing mortals. Eddie was never to forget that look kindled by his rose torches.

They put the roses on the dining-table for a center-piece, and magically they transformed the little square room, with its worn rug and dingy paint, into a banquet chamber. They might have been in a rose garden. Dolly exclaimed, some strange human string tugging in her little artificial being—"Red roses! How dear!"

The dinner was a masterpiece executed by Mrs. Ladd in such homely mediums as flour and sugar and green things, and a fowl from the poulterer's. And a strange and ineffable flavor was imparted thereto—the very spirit of an essence—outside the province of any cook-book. The red roses were like wonderful candelabra in which burned perfumed candles, and the guests about that table were as though they lived for that day in another world—not a world of leather nor of cheap basement commodities, nor one of many pans and pots soaking now in warm water, so that they would come clean

easily; or if these things were of their world, they were only its outer ramparts.

It was so late when they had done Maud's birthday dinner that Mrs. Ladd only stacked the dishes on the kitchen table and they hurried for their car. The park was like a great shifting kaleidoscope. Fred attended Dolly, and went tardily to the bandstand. Then they walked, Eddie with a girl on either arm; or they sat awhile on the benches and listened to the music and amused themselves pretending to distinguish Fred's horn.

Fred came back at the earliest possible moment, looking very military in his gray and gilt; he and Dolly made a very good-looking couple. Eddie felt no restraint — rather gratitude. He thought only one thing — that this was Maud's birthday. This very simplicity of his in the end defeated him. Dolly could not understand it; if Eddie had showed displeasure at Fred's attention, she would have left him happily alone; but Eddie evinced only the most placid content at being left to Maud. When it was time to go, — "Take me home, Eddie!" she commanded; 'I've hardly seen you today!' she complained a little later in the green and gold chintz porch.

How pretty she was, sitting in a corner of the swing, with a tiny foot extended, shod in a buckled sandal like the bronze paper slippers of the dolls in the store; one arm was thrown up behind her little head where the loosened hair waved like shadow tresses; one hand groping along the seat touched

Eddie's. Eddie took up the little hand — what was one such little hand? He put up his arm and reached the other, drawing it gently down. Her round, brown, crystal eyes were half veiled now — but how much more meaning in those veiled eyes! Who can know what is behind white lids?

“Kiss me!”

Had Dolly's lips moved? Did her eyes invite? Was it a whisper? Night noises are very deceiving. But even as Eddie's lips touched hers, as in some horrid magic the green and gold chintz room vanished; there was only a latticed porch with some of its palings gone, great ropes of vines that had a weedy smell, a dizzy swing hung from clanking chains, and a small, common little creature like a cheap doll, reduced to a bargain figure by reason of some defect.

There came to him as he flung down the walk a sudden memory of Marcia Kirk on that last night at home, her face pearl-like in the dark shadow of her hair. For all the burnt letter and the gaping correspondence with his sister, Emma—his mother's eyes were too filmed by reason of the cataracts growing over them, to permit their use at such close work as writing — he had not been able to forget the girl. Sometimes as he had sat with Maud as it grew dusk and her face peered out whitely like a flower of his mother's morning glories, he had half fancied he was home again and that the dusk was the green gloom of Marcia's porch.

He began to walk westward, away from the city,

with no set purpose but only to go. The trolleys clanged past and motor cars glared redly, but he met few pedestrians. After a long time he brought up against a garden.

It was the garden of a suburban home. The house, a handsome one of brick, but of an older era, crowned an incline, and a broad driveway came curving down through too thick shrubbery. Eddie could see the outlines of an arched summer-house with the overgrown garden crowding close to its door. It was not enclosed; the grounds were terraced to the pavement, but a sort of balustrade of stone was set for a little space at this end.

Eddie dropped down upon this narrow settle and stared out into the dark garden. In the night, with its tall grass, its lurking blooms and its overgrown shrubberies, it might have been a thicket. He sat there a long time.

Suddenly a voice said: "Were you lost, Pan? Would you find your way back?"

It was a mocking voice — hardly unpleasant, but with a natural harshness of timbre. Eddie, looking toward the place whence the voice issued, saw a woman in white, wing-like draperies move out from a garden seat behind a thick curtain of shrubs. She was neither young nor old.

"I — never meant — to intrude," muttered Eddie, rising.

"Not at all," said the lady; "I am fond of reading. I have been reading you for a long time. The city has not been kind. What do you think of my garden?"

"It needs pruning," said Eddie.

"Alas!" said the lady, advancing into the open drive-way which the thrown shadows of the branches made to resemble checkered marble. "These barbarians who are to be had for hire, destroy rather than preserve — so it must needs grow wild. Could you tame my garden for me, Pan?"

"She must be touched," thought Eddie. "She talks like a book." But he said:

"Back home we had a market garden and an orchard; and mother had her flowers. You got to know how, is all — and then it takes work."

"'Work'!" mused the lady. "'And you got to know how!' Since you know how, would you work in my garden, Pan?"

"My name's Ed," said Eddie, stiffly; "Edward Pease. Do you mean you want I should come and take care of your garden?"

"Just that!" said the lady.

Here was luck! How could he go back to the basement bargains and the dreary stock and Dolly and the rest? He wanted to forget everything — even the Ladds — and here, at last, he belonged. This was his place — the kind earth and growing things. "I'll come," said Eddie.

"There's a room in the coach-house you may have; it's all fitted up. There are things there, too — working clothes."

"I must tell the Ladds!" said Eddie, suddenly.

"The Ladds?" questioned the lady.

"Where I lived," said Eddie, speaking as of some

remote past. "And get my things." Eddie's belongings scarcely filled one shallow drawer of the Ladds' spare-room dresser.

"Doubtless they can wait," suggested the lady, smiling.

"I will write to them," decided Eddie, after a moment's uneasy thought. He shrank from bidding them good-bye — Mr. Ladd, with his leathery wrinkles, and Mrs. Ladd, with her undaunted cheerfulness and bustle, and Maud, with her lovely, sightless eyes; and even Fred, though he was now seldom at home.

"My name is Miss Avery," said the lady. "And now, good-night. In the morning we will plan where best to begin."

Eddie started toward the coach-house where a pale light bulb swung and gleamed, but turned back.

"How did you know?" he questioned.

"Know?" said the lady.

"About — me —" said Eddie.

"I told you," said the lady, a little impatiently, "I am a great reader; I read faces. I read yours. Good-night."

The next day Eddie dispatched his note to the Ladds. It was very brief — the literal expression of a literal mind:

"I got a place working in a Garden," wrote Eddie. "The lady's name is Miss Avery. How it come about was, I was walking and came to it, and she was sitting and seen me. So I hired out to her and no more at this time.

Resp.,

"EDDIE PEASE.

"P. S.—I forgot to say, would you just pack up my things and I'll call for them. Tell Maud hello."

He felt better, this accomplished, and set to work full of assurance. He had had his interview with Miss Avery; by day in stiff white linen, she looked even older—darker and plainer—and her curiously harsh voice had a sort of metallic click. He detailed to her his conception of what her garden should become, and she listened critically, with only an occasional word. He did not perceive that she was continuing to read him. He saw a woman of a certain height and elegance of build and with a plain, harsh face—an employer, who had a piece of work to be done; and himself, a hired laborer. She saw a youth of the most elemental simplicity—entirely practical, unimaginative, but with a literalness of mind so extraordinary as to make him see everything in symbols; he had a sort of pagan, old-world simplicity, like that of the old world gods; added to this too perfect beauty. Eddie Pease, humble tiller of the soil, without other gifts beyond the most mediocre, had received the doubtful one of pulchritude. Every line of his face, every curve of it, the very set of the head on noble shoulders, was as they had been moulded by some master artificer.

Eddie worked in the garden, clearing away, pruning and transplanting. He had never felt so thoroughly at home since coming to the city. Even the Ladds, kind as they had been, lived the life of grubs. Here he was among his kind; the branches reached out to him like arms, the shrubs began to glow with

homely berries, and the flowery kin of his mother's garden nodded their bright heads at him. He put off going to the Ladds'; perhaps he feared the mute reproachfulness of Maud's blind eyes.

Miss Avery maintained a sort of state in her huge and antiquated house, which had been part of an estate. On Sundays she entertained at solemn family dinners — her brother's family from the city, and various elderly cousins — all of a sober grenadier type. They dined richly and heavily in mid-afternoon, and afterwards sat in the great porches, coming down later into the garden which had begun to take on a certain symmetry. But through the week the house was sunk into a sort of solitude. Two elderly servitors occupied the basement rooms — the woman plodding through her ancient round, her husband assisting, and caring for the horses. Miss Avery kept a carriage. Sometimes Eddie drove her into town. He understood horses, too, for they had horses back home as well as the garden and the orchard. Once when Eddie had drawn up to a curb in the business part at Miss Avery's bidding, a young and vivid girl, too smartly dressed, pushed open the glass entrance doors of a store directly opposite. She stared at Eddie; the stare widened to a smile; she half spoke. Eddie stolidly touched his hat and looked away. The girl was Dolly.

"O, by the way," began Miss Avery that evening; she had come down to see the fountain; it was an old fountain which had been almost overgrown with reedy grass, its base cracked by pushing roots. Ed-

die had restored it, and the water splashed pleasantly from its basin and spray blew out like a fragment of silver veil.

"Who was that girl?" asked Miss Avery, carelessly.

"Her name is Pettit," answered Eddie.

"She is pretty," said Miss Avery. "Did you know her very well, Pan, out there in the world?"

"I used to know her," said Eddie, with finality.

"And you thought her pretty?" persisted Miss Avery.

Eddie considered honestly. He answered out of his dreadful literalness, "She looks like a doll in a show-case."

This reply seemed oddly to please his mistress. "I can see — you don't care for dolls. Some men do."

She sat on a marble seat and looked at her fountain. The seat and the fountain had come to the garden many years before; they had all been young together — the house and the fountain and the bench; and the garden only a beginning; the woman, too, had been young. Now the garden only was green and lovely, but the house had a sort of dignity — narrow, tall, and of a sombre red, it had preserved the traditions of an older generation. And the stain on the bench and the fountain gave them a mellow look — as if they had lived. Only the woman had subtly lost in the ageing.

She drew a thin silk scarf about her head; her feet rested on the marble base; her dress flowed

about her and in the stillness its folds resembled folds in sculpture; her arm lay curved along the seat and her hand, half concealed by a silken fringe, might have been a sculptured hand. She might have been a marble lady gazing at her marble fountain.

Eddie said, "You look like something I seen once — in a park — a statue."

This, too, seemed oddly to please Miss Avery. She rose and bade him follow her. At the porch she told him to wait, and she went inside. Through the high and narrow lighted windows he could see her moving about among the shelves of books. They jutted out from the walls like the shelves in the department store, only those were cluttered with trumpery glass and china, and these bore only many volumes. At last she found what she had been searching for, and came out to him.

"Know why I like to call you 'Pan'?" she questioned. "Listen, now, while I read."

Eddie leant against a pillar. The porch light, resembling an old lanthorn, threw into relief her harsh face and the slender and youthful elegance of her figure. She read in her queer, harsh voice:

"'In the old mythologies Pan was represented in uncouth and grotesque fashion with goats' legs, a shaggy covering of hair, a goat's beard and curving horns. But the moderns are wiser, or less superstitious, who have glimpsed him about the country side, haunting old woods, and gardens, whistling upon the reeds about old fountains, and disporting himself among his kind — young trees, plants and streams — a foster child of Nature.'"

"Well," questioned Miss Avery; "catch the likeness?"

"We're out of door chaps," granted Eddie. And he added with his dreadful literalness, "And we're young!"

Miss Avery flushed — not becomingly — a swart red; and presently said "Good-night!"

But next day she asked him to come to the room with the books any evening. "Read, Pan; read — read! Complete your education. Every book's a branch. Make your own choice — there's a wide selection — Romance, History, Poetry. We're not likely to bother each other."

Eddie obeyed promptly. He had never cared much for books. Still it was growing cool now — one must soon spend the evenings indoors. He dressed with his usual care when he had finished his work for the day, and went to the library as she had bade him. He looked along the titles — abstract, uncommunicative things — like strangers whose names have been mumbled in the introduction. In a lower compartment were some old magazines. He drew one out at random.

Immediately his face lighted; its puzzled vagueness of expression lifted. He sat down, spread open his magazine, leant his head on his hand, and followed the text steadily, only pausing at times to turn a page. Finally he looked up, just as Miss Avery entered. He rose.

"You needn't go, Pan."

"I'm through," said Eddie.

"Did you find something you liked?" asked Miss Avery, eyeing the magazine which bore an old date.

He opened to the place, and showed her the heading: "Bee Culture," read Miss Avery, helplessly.

"We got some stands back home," said Eddie. "I see where we could do better."

He continued to read in the evenings, even sampling certain of the books she placed out for him. But they were rarely to his taste. The realistic ones left him unmoved; literal himself, he perceived them literal truth; but he had no imagination, and they photographed blank. The romantic ones he promptly labelled "lies" and had thereupon no further interest in them. Poetry puzzled him; he had to have it diagrammed.

But he continued to browse among the years-old magazines that had lain there gathering dust from the city brother's time; and across the table from him as the days grew on to winter, Miss Avery sat and read — perhaps him — perhaps the pages that lay so carelessly open and were so seldom turned.

One Sunday, after the solemn, stodgy dinner, the brother's wife and the elderly cousins had gone away in scared dismissal, and there had been a great scene between Miss Avery and her brother in the library which had known of late only silent evenings and mute companionship.

"Who's being made a fool of this time?" stormed Miss Avery's brother; "and over a pretty face, too! Because your affianced, through no fault of your own, I grant you, was cozened by a pretty minx, and got his just deserts — she's yellow as a dried pea-

shuck — a wizened pod — shall you forget yourself — and for this pretty boy? I'm told you pass whole evenings with him!"

"Who has told you all these things, my dear brother?" asked Miss Avery, in her mocking voice, the natural harshness of which was masked beneath an ironic gentleness. "My two jailers who serve me?"

"No matter!" blustered the brother. "Be thankful there are those who would protect you — against yourself!"

"And protect you, my good brother — and your rightful share!" said the lady in a curiously gentle voice that had power to inflame the more.

"Where is the beggar?" shouted the brother. "He may listen to reason!"

"Careful, careful," warned Miss Avery. "Don't be too precipitate, brother; you might regret it." She repeated even more gently, "You might regret it. Better go quietly away — first."

She continued to look fixedly at him. He was conscious that he had borne himself ill. On that stage of the old library, with its monotonous setting of shelves and plaster casts, among those mute and staring volumes in some of which doubtless, her starved, cheated and unhappy life had its prototype, it was as if she had played some good part to its triumphant end. He went out without a word, and down the curving drive-way — a big, beefy figure, looking somehow curiously dwarfed through the vista of the garden.

After some weeks the solemn family dinners were

revived. First, the elderly cousins stole back, desiring to be fed from the crumbs of her rich table, and afterwards the scared sister-in-law and the sulky brother. A sort of peace was patched up. And as the winter wore on, the quiet evenings in the library became a custom.

Eddie had acquired a pocket note-book, into which he transcribed in a round, careful hand, much of the subject matter of his nightly readings. Thus under "Hot Beds" were voluminous pages of notes; but his criticism was short and to the point in the case of a volume which he had been induced to peruse at Miss Avery's instance: "Don't think much of it."

One morning Eddie was repotting ferns. He had carefully dumped the plant with its earthy roots upon an old newspaper. It was early spring and a fragrant mist steamed up from the moist ground. He lifted the fern with its cloddy roots and a name sprang up at him from the paper — Ladd.

Eddie read: "Maud Ladd, aged twenty years —" the letters ran together; there followed only a blur. Finally words assembled: "The funeral will be held at four o'clock tomorrow from the home of her parents." The date on the paper was nearly two weeks old.

Eddie finished repotting the ferns, and then, having dressed in his usual careful fashion, presented himself to Miss Avery and requested the day off.

"I must go," said Eddie. "It's the Ladds;" and he added, "I've waited too long."

"Do your Ladds like flowers?" asked Miss Avery, carelessly. "Pick a bouquet for them, Eddie."

"No," decided Eddie, after a moment. "Maud liked florists' roses — red roses with long stems in a green box."

He stopped down town and bought red roses for Maud. With the narrow green box under his arm, he went up the sagging porch. Mrs. Ladd came to the door. When she saw Eddie, natural feeling overcame her. She employed her apron copiously for a season, but was soon in the full flow of her recital from which she seemed to derive a mournful comfort.

"She wasn't sick only 'bout a week," said Mrs. Ladd. "Fever — and then it took a pneumonia turn. If we'd a known where to send for you — Maud says, 'Tell Eddie I waited'."

She went away, and came back with a crimson knitted strip. "It's for you — a neck-tie. Don't you remember Maud a-knitting it? She had it laid away in the drawer with your other things. Wait a minute, Eddie, and I'll get your things."

She gave him the bundle, but still held jealously to the strip of knitted silk. "It was the last work Maud done."

"You keep it, Mrs. Ladd," begged Eddie; "then it'll be both of ours." He could not have brought himself to wear it. Mrs. Ladd accepted the proviso gratefully.

She laid off the apron that covered her black dress, and went with him. Eddie laid his red roses, like splendid reversed torches, upon Maud's grave.

That night Eddie read rather later than usual in the library, making sprawling annotations in his

pocket note-book. Finally, he slapped it shut and rose.

"I thought I would tell you," said Eddie, "that I won't be working after this month — not here."

"Not here!" exclaimed Miss Avery. "Don't your place suit?"

"It ain't the place," said Eddie, patiently; "but I got to get a place of my own. You see, part of the home place is mine."

"It will wait," suggested Miss Avery, in her mocking, harsh voice.

"Sometimes folks wait too long," said Eddie.

"You needn't wait any longer," said Miss Avery, harshly. "You may go at any time."

"I'll wait till my month's up," said Eddie, stolidly.

"O, I'll pay you — for the unexpired portion," flung Miss Avery, lightly.

"I'd ruther work for it," said Eddie.

But thereafter he came no more to the library. Perhaps that last night, when he had overstayed a trifle, he had completed his reading. But Miss Avery continued each evening to sit there reading — who knows — perhaps the future — for her, dull reading enough.

One evening of spring, scarce a year from his jubilant departure, Eddie Pease arrived home. The first person he met was old Johnny Meek, limping along, pushing his pop-corn wagon ahead.

"Hello, Eddie!" cried old Johnny. "Find what you went for?"

"Found I'd left it here," said Eddie.

He continued down the street. Willy Gentry was running a lawn-mower about his little front yard.

"If here ain't Eddie!" shouted Willy Gentry. "You can't guess what I got, Eddie! Come on in and see!"

A young woman appeared at the door. She was pale with the pallor of young motherhood, and her round brown eyes, with their sharply curved lashes, were bent upon a bundle in her arms. It might have been a bale of fine cloth, lace and embroideries, but Eddie knew better; he knew it was Willy and Ida Gentry's baby.

His folks were at supper. At first glance it seemed to him that his sister, Emma, was wonderfully younger and prettier than before he went away. She sprang up to put a plate for him. His mother's eyes, behind their curious film, had a misty light; the brothers greeted each other casually, as if they had met daily. The new man, Eddie perceived, was quite like one of the family.

After supper, Eddie removed his collar and splashed his face and hands at the kitchen sink, leaving great rivulets of drops meandering down the clean oil-cloth. Then he went upstairs to his old room.

"What's he doing?" called his mother to his sister, Emma, from the darkened front room.

"Dressin', I guess; he's took off his collar," answered his sister, Emma. "Shall I light the lamp?"

"Not yet. When'll he be down, I wonder?"

"I guess that's him now."

"Better light it then."

Eddie came in blinking. He was carefully brushed and polished. It did not occur to him to sit awhile with his mother and sister — why should he? he had come home to stay.

“Guess I’ll go over to Kirks’,” he muttered.

“Do,” said his mother. “Marcy Kirk’s a good girl.” And she added, meaningly, “She got no need to keep a-waitin’.”

Eddie went out through the garden. In the moonlight the cabbages looked like great silver roses. He saw his sister, Emma, and Dave, the hired hand, bending over the frame of tomato plants.

Marcia came to the door. She was carrying a hand-lamp, and at sight of him, she gave a little cry and set the lamp down upon a table behind her. In the black screen she looked, as Eddie had seen her once before, like a picture in a narrow frame.

She came out into the vine-curtained porch. This time a hundred clicking heels would not have deterred Eddie. And when he had kissed her, he simply and methodically told her what he meant by it.

“We won’t wait,” said Eddie; “we been waitin’ long enough. Sometimes folks waits too long.”

“We’ll have a June weddin’,” agreed Marcia — “with roses!”

“Not red roses!” cried Eddie, sharply.

“Who ever heard of red roses,” scorned Marcia, gently, “for a weddin’? We’ll have a pink and white weddin’.”

The beloved woman beside him, Eddie yet felt a sudden, fierce protectiveness for the dead girl. He thought: “Let Maud keep her red roses!”

